# Solution Encourages Exchange of Experiences

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| Austria  Customer Profile  The Association of Austrian Cities and Towns represents the interests of 250 local governments across Austria through better legislation, sharing of tax revenues and the exchange and implementation of new ideas and policies: <http://staedtebund.wien.at/>.  Situation  Faced with budget cuts and the inefficient exchange of IT knowledge at the local level, the Association needed a way to improve communication between IT experts, and facilitate the sharing and replication of successful best practices.  Solution  The Association leveraged the Microsoft Solutions Sharing Network program and created a centralized portal, built on Office SharePoint Server, to facilitate the exchange and reuse of experiences, information, and tools between Austrian municipalities.  Benefits  • Formalize communication between municipalities  • Stimulate the exchange of best practices  • Decreased IT costs with availability of IP | "The launch of an Internet platform for exchange of local-level experiences was an important strategic objective for our association. Thanks to the Solutions Sharing Network we could quickly start from a sophisticated technical basic infrastructure."  — Dr. Thomas Weninger » secretary general, Association of Austrian Cities and Towns  To enhance collaboration and the sharing of best practices between municipalities, the Association of Austrian Cities and Towns leveraged the Microsoft® Solutions Sharing Network program to create a well-structured platform for communication between local government IT experts.  Situation  Austria.jpgThe Association of Austrian Cities and Towns is focused on representing the interests of local governments throughout the country. The Association assists municipalities in negotiations over the sharing of budgetary funds and taxation rights between the federal government, provinces, and local authorities, and ensures that a local government point-of-view is represented in federal legislation.  The Association has also formed 30 technical communities which they refer to as the “Exchange of Experience.” |

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| "Cooperation, communication, know-how transfer, and local-level expertise are the four cornerstones of K4, the Solutions Sharing Network-based platform provided for the Association of Austrian Cities and Towns."  — Gerald Schindler, MSc » chairman, Center for Public Administration Cooperation (ZVK) | These communities explore innovative measures and programs adopted by the towns and communities, develop statements regarding new legislation and discuss the implementation of new policies and programs.  Faced with looming budget cuts, the Association needed a way to optimize the Exchange of Experience and other cooperative projects in order to more  effectively share costs between participating local governments. In addition to lowering operational costs, the Association believed cooperation would drive innovation, as cities and towns could more easily share studies, documentation, and concepts developed from field-driven information technology (IT) projects.  At the time, new solutions or ideas developed by the municipalities were only being shared during face-to-face meetings. The Association needed a better way to structure communication between the cities and towns, along with a solution for exchanging studies, experiences, and tools as they were developed. Recognizing the need for a more effective way to share best practices and improve collaboration between local governments, the Association turned to Microsoft for help.  Solution  The Association chose to work with the Microsoft Solutions Sharing Network (SSN) program, created to drive the sharing of IT solutions and best practices within public sector technical communities. Microsoft worked with the Association to implement a centralized portal built on Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2003. The portal is used as the repository for IT code and associated studies and documentation which is stored electronically and quickly accessible by participating cities and towns. Currently eight local governments are active participants, with the expectation that all 250 member authorities will begin using the solution eventually.  The portal includes membership features that enable local governments to easily create accounts and register their information in the repository. Members are alerted via e-mail when information is posted to an area they subscribe to. SSN simplifies content administration for the Association, allowing them to automate membership requests, provision sites in one or two clicks, and manage passwords and memberships in a streamlined process. The Association can more effectively track and measure the reuse of information, including the information being accessed by users and the ideas being implemented across the country. |
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| For more informationFor general questions about Solutions Sharing Network, please email getssn@microsoft.com. Visit http://solshare.net, an online community to share public sector IT ideas and best practices.Visit the Association of Austrian Cities and Towns at <http://staedtebund.wien.at/>. | The Association is integrating other cooperative projects into the SSN, including e-government reference architecture (EGORA), a software development framework based on Microsoft .NET that local governments can use to develop e-government applications. They are working on the EGORA in cooperation with Microsoft and making the platform available to all public sector organizations free of charge.  The Association is also working on an Austrian e-forms project that provides electronic government forms to Austrian citizens. Seven Austrian cities are currently involved in this project with more than 70 forms already available. In addition, the Association is developing a customer care management solution and helpdesk that local authorities can use to ask questions of the Association.  With many collaborative IT projects assisted by Microsoft or enabled by SharePoint technologies to facilitate content movement and sharing ideas, the Association has created a flourishing community that better represents the interests of Austrian local governments.  Benefits  Participation in the SSN program has allowed the Association to create a well-structured platform for sharing reusable applications with accompanying information such as studies and experience reports. Some of these applications include:   * Two Microsoft Office plug-ins:   + EDIAKAT plug-in. This is a Microsoft Word plug-in to open, create, and edit EDIAKAT files. [EDIAKAT](http://reference.e-government.gv.at/EDIAKT_II.599.0.html) is a standard for government data exchange in Austria.   + ebInterface plug-in. This is a plug-in that can be used to create electronic invoices following the [ebInterface](http://www.ebinterface.at/en/standard.html) standard. * A Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 Business Data Catalog (BDC) for Fabasoft. Fabasoft just started work to implement a BDM that enables a search function with SharePoint Server 2007 directly on the Fabasoft user interface.   Additionally, with more formalized communication and an efficient exchange of experiences between IT experts in each city, the Association now only needs to meet twice per year to achieve their goals. |